THE STORY OF M.M.M. - HOW THEY BEGAN.

GLENSTAL PRIORY.

(Written for the first issue of the magazine but not published).

The Medical Missionaries found their first home in Ireland in the Benedictine Priory at Glenstal, Co. Limerick.

Approaching from the little village of Murroe, Co. Limerick by a long avenue traversing a hillside we reach this Priory so beautifully situated among lake and woodland scenery. From the towers and terraces of the Castle, built on the slopes of Slieve Felim, the view extends far beyond Limerick and the Shannon to the west, to the Galtee mountains to the east and south east, and over the Golden Vale to the south.

In May 1927 the first group of monks entered Glenstal from Maredsous in Belgium. Though few in number they started immediately their Monastic life. No work, manual or intellectual is excluded from their vocation and in Glenstal they had for many years to provide many commodities and even necessities by the labour of their own hands.

Thr first foundation established in the new Monastery was a school of artistic crafts for boys of the working class, to train them in skillful and beautiful work. A few years afterwards a college was opened to give boys a classical education. In the meantime the monks rendered the spiritual services of edification to the people of the district. They spread little by little the ideas and the sense of beauty in the cult of God, both by the productions of the Art School and by the lectures and lessons on the plain chant and the liturgy.

Nothing proves better the supernatural vitality of the old Monastic Orders than their suppleness of adaption and the attraction they exercise after so many centuries on"active souls" as well as on those who feel called to the "peace of contemplation". In our time of feverish activity a fresh proof of this was given when the newly founded Institute of the Medical Missionaries of Mary, frankly modern, found a solid resting place in a Benedictine Priory;

and a spirit which enlarges and unifies their work and the souls consecrated to it.

The circumstances of the foundation of the Medical Missionaries of Mary illustrates in an astonishing manner the way Divine Providence fashions it's instruments, and proves how confidence in God and perseverance in prayer are the first resources of souls who wish to do a supernatural work.

Miss Martin through her experience in Africa saw that for the modern Missionary, work and devotion is not enough if it is not accompanied by an efficient and professional training in the medical sciences. She saw no less clearly that their professional activity could not have it's true character and constancy unless the members are filled with a real spirit of sacrifice and supernatural charity and safeguarded against changes by a suitable organisation. In practice only a Religious Congregation would fulfil these conditions.

The story of the foundation would fill many pages if all the details were to be written. Here we give a short sketch of it, and it presents this very distinctive idea that it began in a missionary land,

The Foundress Miss Mary Martin after nursing through the great war 1914 - 1918, heard from Bishop Shanahan C.S.Sp of thegreat need of medical assistance on the African Missions. In 1921 after taking her C.M.B. at the National Maternity Hospital, Hollis St. set out for Southern Nigeria.

Some years of experience as a nurse and teacher among the pagans gave her a practical knowledge of the difficulties and requirements of a suitable organisation for the much needed work to which she felt specially called.
She began her Novitiate in Africa which was broken by her return home at the request of the Bishop to begin another Novitiate. Here she did not find the idea she had already thought of establishing a Medical Mission. The idea persisted for years, though it seemed but a dream. Many things happened which seemed to make it impossible - among them continued ill health.

Her ideal remained steadfast but God's time had not come. She took refuge in God and waited a sign of His Holy Will. She heard His words and her soul opened itself to this spring of life so new to her. She paid a visit to the newly founded Priory at Glenstal. Providence prepared a place for her here. The college was about to be opened and the need of a steady personnel to maintain the household services was urgent. An arrangement was made by which Miss Mary Martin took over the household side thereby assuring a good functioning of the school at Glenstal, and at the same time found an opening for her dreamed of work in Benedictine soil.

Here with a few companions she carried on the humble household duties of the school, helping the monks in their new foundation, giving their time and strength without reserve, and asking nothing in return except to live in this atmosphere of recollection and work within the influence of the Monastery. The Master of Novices was appointed to give conferences to the little group twice weekly. A thorough training in the religious and spiritual life was given in an atmosphere where it was felt more even than taught that God is first in all - that a Religious life means " to look really for God". There they drank in joy from the inspiring well of sacred liturgy and they realised that no work is worth while, nor useful in the Kingdom of God which is not rooted in obscure and disinterested labour and nourished by prayer in the hidden chamber of the soul where one lives for God alone.

These were happy, hidden days when the first little group with their Foundress waited in blind faith in these novel surroundings for the hour of God. There were yet practical difficulties of all kinds, but perhaps the chief difficulty which lay across the path like a great barrier, was the fact that the Church did not in general approve of unrestricted medical work for nuns. Certain fields, especially maternity work had traditionally been considered as not suitable for Religious.

Two years passed and in February 1936 an unexpected light appeared in the

shape of an Instruction from the Sacred Propaganda explaining to the Catholic world the urgent need of medical care, especially for the mother and child in pagan lands and asking for new Institutes of women to be founded for unrestricted medical work.

There was no hesitation or delay. The time had now come to launch forth and bring the Infant Society into being. The time had come to bid farewell to Glenstal. Trials, disappointments and uncertainiyies came the way of the Foundress and one of her first moves was to have her first companions trained in maternity work in the National Maternity Hospital, Hollis Street.